10: d'Orleans--288 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 132, 788

"Pakou is a shrine for pilgrimages; the people come from Luang Prabang with great pomp several times a year; they hold boat races, get up picnics, and pray. The grotto has another advantage for us besided its religious interest, for it gives us a fine view over the valley of the Mekong; but it is the middle of the day, and the light is so intense that the distance is lost in a trembling atmosphere of heat. When we return to the pirogues, I find it is more than 125 degrees in the sun, and my alcohol thermometer has burst."

10: d'Orleans--332 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 346, 735, 788

"The temples are public, and they who have no family home are entitled to sleep in them, while upon week days the people come to make offerings of flowers, and perform libations with water, listening to the advice given them by the priests, while the women tell their beads, and signify that they have got through them by blowing through a sea shell."

149: Reinach--124 G-8 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Although less pure than in Cambodia, the bonzes' morals in Laos are generally fairly good. They are, moreover, greatly loved, highly regarded and fondly cherished. When there is a celebration or a great feast in a family, part of the choicest dishes is always reserved for the bonzes.

On the next to the last day of every phase of the moon, the bonzes must make public confession of their faults and be prepared, should the need arise, to undergo the punishments which the code stipulates.

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Bonzeries are schools and at the same time workshops where all trades are taught. All knowledge is concentrated in them, as our knowledge was during the Middle Ages in monasteries.

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Together with the pagodas, they are also spots of inviolable asylum in accordance with certain rights, and hostelries where travelers are lodged and fed with the produce of the bonzes' alms-seeking.

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Newly ordained bonzes must stay in the pagoda at least three months, and may quit their habit at the end of this period. If a bonze desires to return to the pagoda after he has reentered lay life, his reassumption of the habit gives rise to the same formalities and ceremonies as the first time. It is a new ordination.

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The liturgical litanies of the Buddhist religion, which the bonzes psalmodize, may not be translated into Laotian. The bonzes and the [165] [Illustration] [166] [Blank page] [167] Laotian faithful, as well as the cantors and the French adepts, chant prayers whose meaning they do not understand (1).

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(1) In reality the Laotian, Lu and Youn bonzes form a sort of caste as the Druids used to in Gaul. More particularly, they are the ministers of worship, the repositories of moral authority, of scientific traditions, of secrets and of artistic and industrial methods. They transmit by word of mouth the precepts of Buddhist dogma, which were long ago explained by those who introduced the religion into the land. But the writings in "Pali" which contained these, although they can still be read mechanically by a few scholars, are no longer understood. Thence arises the necessity of handing down their meaning by word alone. Thence also, without doubt, arises the increasingly greater attenuation of the purity and force of these principles as they

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779 pass from one generation to another and suffer partial suppressions
778 and numberless interpolations.

[198] The bonzes of our own day do not know the sacred language
792 and are reduced to imitating the "hateful" monks of whom Rabelais speaks, "who neither till the soil nor work, but only mumble a great stock of legends and psalms which they do not understand at all."

792 The bonzes are the ones who consecrate water and prepare with
641 their prayers for the pronunciation of the oath of allegiance which
788 native officials take twice a year to their direct sovereign and, if necessary, to their suzerain both for themselves and for the whole population. The oath consists in reciting the formula and in drinking lustral water in which the candles used for the ceremony have been extinguished and in which the arms of the sovereign have been dipped.

The following is the formula of the oath which is pronounced in Laos twice a year, in the capital of each province, in the presence of the government commissioner. This formula has been in use in the land for centuries and was left just as it was, except for substituting the title of President of the Republic for that of the king of Siam, Vien-Tiane or Luang-Prabang.

Formula of the oath: "I (there follow the names, titles and qualities of each of the mandarins present, each of whom repeats the formula, which is read aloud by one of them, generally the eldest), take an oath of allegiance and offer my life to the President of the French Republic. I give my word before God and before the angels present in heaven. May God and his angels deign to listen to my vows, because the President of the French Republic governs our land with wisdom and skill, follows the ancient customs and protects the bonzes, the authorities and the inhabitants.

"I place myself under his sacred feet, as well as the soldiers and inhabitants who live in my muong, and we all swear him allegiance.

[168] "I ask to serve the administration in the shadow of his sacred feet and to acknowledge his goodness by promising to be faithful and never to revolt in thought, word or body.

"If I show myself ungrateful to, or if I revolt against the President of the French Republic in thought, word or body; if I see or learn that peril threatens the President of the French Republic and remain silent instead of warning him immediately of the peril which I see or know; if I show myself ungrateful towards the President of the

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French Republic, whose happiness and wisdom only grow from day to day, may God and his angels who are present in the air and in heaven punish me, may they deprive me of all necessary things, may they kill me by the sky's lightning, may they strike me with all sorts of terrible maladies, may they cause me to die by the sword or the gun, may wild animals devour me, may I be entirely ruined, and may misfortune burden me everywhere I go or reside. May God and his angels cover my body with sores, and may diseases strike me, and may I die abandoned by all so as to serve as an example to the world; after my death may I be condemned for centuries to the flames of hell, and may nothing enable me to escape these exemplary punishments.

"If after (a thousand years) I am reborn to a new life in any part of the world whatsoever, may I not have an instant of happiness, may I lack everything, and may I never see God and his angels, who will never be able to cleanse me of the fault which I have committed by showing myself ungrateful and faithless towards the President of the French Republic.

"If, on the contrary, I am grateful and faithful to the President of the French Republic, if I never revolt in thought, word or body, if I never ally myself with foreigners to disturb his security and that of his people, may God and his angels who are present in the air and in heaven make me live long in this world, may I avoid all the dangers which threaten me, and may I be exempt from all human slavery; I drink the water of the oath; may peace and prosperity reign in my home.

"After my death, as a reward for my faithfulness, may my happiness continue in heaven in a place where joys and pleasures abound, and may I find myself with God in the midst of his angels. If later on (in a thousand years) I am reborn to a new life, may I be showered with riches, dignities, joys and pleasures, may I obtain all that I desire, may I be exempt from all human misery, and finally may I again find myself in the presence of God and his angels, as a reward for my fidelity and my gratitude, with the President of the French Republic.

"I drink the water of the oath" (1).

(1) After Captain Gosselin, op. cit. [Le Laos et le Protectorat français, 1900.]

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641] [169] The formula used in southern Laos is more concise and slightly different.

695 The natives of Laos, whatever their race, have a great respect for any oath and stand in much dread of the consequences of perjury.

Oaths are widely used in courts of law in cases of disputes between individuals. When a judge has reached the end of his arguments and is confronted with a stubborn plaintiff he sends him to the pagoda before the sacred statues to deny the accusation or affirm his statements.

In this case, the above formula is modified in accordance with the needs of the case, as regards the object of the oath and the type of authority invoked as sanction. But the basis is always the same.

As a means of legal procedure, an oath is regarded as an argument of such force and of such grave consequences that it is used only as a last resort. In Laos it is the ultima ratio judicium.

805 The Laotian calendar (1). The Laotian year is calculated on the

[792] (1) Since the bonzes establish the calendar we have thought it well to place this information in the chapter devoted to religion in Laos.

phases of the moon and includes twelve months which are divided into twenty-four half-moons. The months have thirty and twenty-nine days alternately, giving 354 days in the year or eleven days less than in the solar year.

In reality the Laotian calendar is luni-solar, for in order to bring the ordinary year into approximate harmony with the solar year an extra month is inserted every three years after the eighth month, and repeats the latter. It is called the "second eighth month" (Dueune pèt song). In chronological dating, the Laotian year begins about the middle of the fifth month (April).

Like the Siamese, the Laotians have adopted a system for coordinating and numbering their years which is based on a great cycle of sixty years and two other intermediate cycles of ten and twelve years each. The first of these intermediate cycles is decimal, and the second is zodiacal (duodecimal).

[170] Each year is designated first by the name of the great cycle, then by those of each of the intermediate cycles and by a chronological number.

314 Indeed scavenging, that is to say the gathering of forest products, hunting and fishing, is all that is needed besides rice and maize to supply the day to day needs of the native and even provide him with a comparatively important basis for trade.

Forest Products

1. Benzoin (Khab-Niane).

314 824 Benzoin is extracted from the tree called Styrax benzoin, by means of incisions made on the trunk. The benzoin trees (Kok-Khab-Niane) are localized in Upper Tran-Ninh, the south of the Hua-Pahn and the north of the province of Luang-Prabang. They are not cultivated in [563] any way. The resin or gum is harvested at certain times of the year, generally by the Khas, at the foot of the trees and along the trunk, where it coagulates in masses or tears.

Benzoin is collected in its natural state, that is to say in tears of various sizes and in breakages. In the production centers it is separated into three grades: large and medium tears, medium and small tears, and small pieces and breakages. In the transit markets these three grades are sorted and screened and once more divided into six kinds or types, which are: large tears, medium tears, small tears, mixed large, mixed medium, and finally tiny fragments and dust.

[43 II] A few years ago a chemical process was [329] discovered, it would seem, for extracting certain of the aromatic alkaloids contained in benzoin from coal, and the market value of this product suddenly [1435] dropped by more than sixty percent. At the present time, depending on the grade, the market price in Luang-Prabang is from 90 to 115 francs per hundred kilograms (1), in Nong-Khay from 100 to 135

(1) We have deemed it preferable to give the price in francs and per hundred kilograms, since the reader may not be familiar with Laotian weights and currency.

788 314 439 francs, and in Korat from 120 to 160 francs.

Part of the benzoin production is consumed locally in the manufacture of sticks of incense for use in worship. All the rest is exported to Bangkok and from there to Europe. A very small proportion is sent to Tonkin by way of the Black River. Upon its arrival in Bangkok, benzoin from Laos is worth twice as much as in Luang-Prabang.

824 314 ### 2. Crimson lake or stick-lac (Khang-Deng).

This gum is produced by an insect of the "cochineal" type, the

175 the fourteenth century. Archaeological discoveries made in recent
177 years in the region of Luang Prabang and more recent ones in the
779 neighborhood of Vientiane may enable this important event in the religious history of Laos to be moved back more than two centuries.

[23] The Pagoda.

346 "Laotians liked to place their pagodas on high points, but their
778 marked taste for the edge of the water made them prefer the neighborhood of rivers. This location of pagodas is a natural consequence of
[792] the relations between bonzes and inhabitants. The former drew their livelihood from the latter, and these are crowded on the river banks."
In principle the pagoda consists of three elements:

346 1) The buildings connected directly with the cult: vat, chapels, libraries; that, standing landmarks and niches;

2) The surrounding enclosures, exterior and interior;

3) The buildings for the immediate use of the inhabitants of the pagoda: monastery [bonzerie], cells for the bonzes, reception halls.

The vat consists of a large hall furnished with a pedestal on which stands the statue of the Buddha often accompanied by a preaching pulpit. The columns and walls are frequently ornamented with paintings.

Among the annexes of the vat, the most numerous are the chapels which are in the form either of delicate buildings or small compound halls.

The that is a votive and sometimes a funereal monument. (See appendix on Vientiane).

The only piece of furniture always found in the vat is the preaching pulpit, an elegant construction, often made of gilded wood. By way of furniture there are a few seats for the chiefs of the bonzes,
[788] particularly for the torch bearer. Finally, particularly in the region of Luang Prabang, one finds the hang-lin, a curious spout-shaped object, with elegant decoration, which is used for sprinkling the Buddhas on great feast days (cf. the New Year). These various finely carved objects are usually made of gilded wood and are sometimes inlaid with enamelled lead [24] whose brilliant gleam makes them sparkle. The manuscript chests are usually collected in the
[27] libraries, piled up in the shape of an inverted pyramid; they are generally carved and gilded.

include all the local genii one comes across in Indochina, either under the name of Neak Ta in Cambodia, or Phi in Laos, to mention only two countries. The cult of the Phi is still very much alive in Laos, although it has long been contested by the Buddhist clergy and forbidden by an edict of Phothisarath in 1527.

[30] But there are several classes of phi. First of all there are the universal phi, those are the ones which Buddhist tradition has attempted to assimilate for better or worse.

The book of Khun Bolom says precisely that the Phi Fa (Phi of heaven) and the Phi Then are in reality Indra, and the guardians of the four worlds. The Phi Sua Muon are Nang Tholani (Dharani, goddess of the earth) and Nang Mekhala (Manimekhala, deity of the sea). Finally there is the Phi Then Ten (Visvakarman, the builder).

The local protecting genii of the kingdom of Lan Xan are the fifteen Nagaraja (Praya Nak) who are the genii of water, living in the river rapids, at the confluence of rivers, on the rocks on the river banks or in caves. Their natural form is that of a serpent, but they can also take on human form.

Then follow the familiar genii, the wandering phi (Phi Pho), and the phi of dwellings (Phi Heuan). The Phi Heuan are honored at the time of marriage, and the Laotian code prescribes the indemnities which must be paid to please the Phi. There are also the phi of parents [or relatives--Translator] (Phi Me). These are often confused with the preceding ones. Their cult is celebrated either inside the house, or outside in a small shelter built for this purpose. This little structure is usually built leaning against a tree; sometimes it contains a small statuette or a stone, or even nothing. In that case one finds only a few grains of glutinous rice, and one or two small sticks of incense in a horn made of a banana leaf. This little house is the home of the Phi. He watches the living from the beyond and manifests himself every time a member of the family behaves badly. His intervention is most often known by a sudden and serious illness. One must then try to find out what has displeased the phi. For this one goes to the "sorcerer" and he will indicate [31] the sacrifice which must be made to the phi to appease his anger."

There exist also village phi to whom honor and offerings are due at the time of every ritual or local ceremony, particularly about the seventh month. Coinciding with a sort of pause in the ordinary activity of the Laotian, a pause which is regulated by a change in season, return of the rains and the rise of the Mekong waters, the feasts of the "months of the spirits" are centered around the evocation

805 [34] The Days.

The Laotian week follows the same order as the French week:

Van Athit	Sunday
Van Tian	Wednesday [sic]
Van Ang Kam	Tuesday
Van Phut	Wednesday
Van Phahat	Friday [sic]
Van Souk	Monday [sic]
Van Sao	Saturday

The Hours.

The day is 24 hours long and is divided into 16 ngam (periods of an hour and a half each).

796 All the Laotian feasts are dated according to this calendar. The Buddhist feasts are listed in a manuscript of the Vat Pra Keo called Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si.

THE BOUN (Sk. punya)

796 788 Every newcomer to Laos will quickly learn to recognize the word boun. Literally this term means "to obtain merits, to give alms," but by extension, it designates the ceremony or feast which accompanies this act. Its meaning has degenerated rather quickly and to "make a boun" means "celebrate a feast."

The religious boun consists essentially in presenting offerings of candles, flowers, etc. to the images of Buddha and gifts to the bonzes after having accomplished the pradakshina or ritual "circumambulation" of the pagoda with lighted candles. This pradakshina is an ancient Brahmanic rite which consists in turning around a funeral pyre or a monument, keeping it always on the right.

Feast of Khao Chi (See below after the feast of the harvest).

796 Makha Bousa (Feast of the third month).

[35] The first religious feast of the Laotian year is that of the "Makha Bousa." It takes place on the fifteenth day of the crescent moon of the third month (end of January to middle of February).

This is the origin:

"Near Vaisali in the country-town of Belouva, a serious illness attacked the Buddha, and he was near death. Then he thought of his

173: Deydier--36 H, B-3 (no date) 1952 AM1 Indochina
(ca. 1940) Laotians AM8

Marriage

In Laos one gets married in the even months. The favorite month is the sixth, that of the feast of rockets, and the last one possible, because in the eighth month the sons-in-law do not dare to interrupt the work in the fields and after that until the twelfth month the Buddhist Lent must be observed. 585 805

[56] **The Marriage Proposal.** Laotian tradition requires a previous request, and the obligatory giving of the Kha Khun Phi, tribute paid to the guardian genii, also the optional gift of the Kha Dong, the dowery which is given by the husband to the bride or to her parents. [782] 584

The boy's mother, accompanied by one or two aged female relatives, goes to the home of the young girl, and in the course of conversing asks if the girl is of age to be married. The mother is free to answer that her daughter is too young or that no young man loves her, and that she runs the risk of remaining an old maid. In this last event the answer is an acceptance. Then during further visits material questions are settled. Up until the day of marriage the two affianced ones do not exchange a single word, and besides it is not necessary for them to know each other. However, as the Laotian villages are not very big, it is probable that the young people have had the opportunity to meet several times at the boun.

The official request takes place the day before the wedding and on the evening of this day, after dinner, the young man goes to the home of his future bride and with her attends the prayer of the bonzes who bless the water contained in begging bowls. A white cotton cord links together the bonzes, the begging bowls and the two betrothed. The blessed water is kept throughout the night. The next day at the earliest hour the same bonzes, the relatives and friends come and sprinkle the two young people generously with this water. When they have dried themselves and changed their clothes, they make their morning offering to the bonzes who bless them once more. 788 584

The Sou Khouan. This is properly called the marriage ceremony. The days and hours for the ceremony are determined by the aged hora (astrologists or soothsayers) after a minute study of the horoscopes of each one. This ceremony takes place in the home of the young girl. After a [57] family Sou Khouan celebrated at his home, the husband returns to his betrothed accompanied by two comrades who protect him with two parasols and followed by a procession of bearers. 585 [787]